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Achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, as well as implementing the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits: progress made, challenges and opportunities

Final report of the fifty-seventh annual DPI/NGO Conference

Millennium Development Goals: civil society takes action

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Final Report of the fifty-seventh annual DPI/NGO Conference
Millennium Development Goals: Civil Society Takes Action

Presented to the Committee on NGOs, 17 May 2005
by Sister Joan Kirby, Conference Chair,
Representative of the Temple of Understanding

Overview

The fifty-seventh annual DPI/NGO Conference, entitled "Millennium Development Goals: civil society takes action", took place at United Nations Headquarters from 8-10 September 2004. It brought together over 1,800 representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work with the United Nations through the Department of Public Information (DPI) and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). As every year before the opening of the General Assembly, NGO representatives come from around the world to explore ways to support the United Nations through information sharing in critical areas of international concern. The Conference provided the opportunity to consult among themselves and share views with UN and Government officials, as well as private sector, academic and media representatives and other civil society partners.

The Conference was characterized by an urgent and activist concern that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), adopted by the General Assembly in 2000, are not receiving sufficient support from Member States and are not well known or understood outside of the United Nations system. Organizers of the Conference - the Executive Committee of the NGOs associated with the DPI and the NGO Section of DPI - focused the plenary sessions, the Midday NGO Interactive Workshops and innovative networking sessions on ways that NGOs can mobilize public support for the MDGs and work in partnership with Governments and the United Nations to ensure their realization by 2015. The theme of partnership came to dominate the Conference. Participants also enthusiastically and unanimously endorsed their sustained involvement in support of the MDGs over the long term.

The Conference took place at a crucial point in the MDG process, which has its roots in the world conferences on development of the 1990s. Jeffrey Sachs, Special Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General on the Millennium Development Goals, in his special address to the Conference, argued that political will and public support must be mobilized during the next 12 months if the campaign is to be sustained over the next decade. Although the United Nations system has embraced the MDGs and is reorienting its work to make them a priority, government support for them must be strengthened, and civil society's involvement in and awareness of them must be greatly enhanced if they are to meet the time-bound and quantified targets.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the President of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Julian R. Hunte, opened the Conference and emphasized the central role that partnerships between civil society, the United Nations, Governments, and the private sector are playing in the process.

The Conference addressed five central themes: the current status of the MDG campaign globally; the obstacles to their realization; the requirements of North/South partnerships; identification of strategies that can enable NGOs to have an impact at the local and national levels, and concrete recommendations of Conference participants regarding civil society support for the MDGs.

Representatives of NGOs from the North and the South provided their experiences and concerns, frequently pointing out the devastating impact that unfair international trade policies have on the ability of many countries to eradicate poverty and provide economic and social security for their people. Media representatives and academics underscored the importance of focused and innovative use of information sharing technologies to involve civil society organizations and pressure both government and the private sector to be more responsive to the interests of all citizens.

The NGO/DPI Executive Committee, the elected body of the 1,500 NGOs associated with DPI, appointed Ms. Joan Kirby, Representative of the Temple of Understanding, as Chair of the Conference. Ms. Kirby and Paul Hoeffel, Chief of the NGO Section of DPI, served as co-chairs of the Conference Planning Committee.

The Conference was attended by 1,800 NGO representatives from 555 organizations from 66 countries. Of these, 850 participants stated that it was the first time they attended the Conference. Nearly 3,000 persons preregistered for the Conference. Many were unable to attend because of visa restrictions by the host country and financial constraints.

Over 200 additional persons, representing the range of stakeholders in the MDG process and many United Nations staff also participated in the proceedings. The organizers worked particularly closely with the MDG Campaign, headed by Ms. Eveline Herfkens, who was the keynote speaker at the opening session.

Plenary Sessions and Midday NGO Interactive Workshops

The Conference plenary sessions and Midday NGO Interactive Workshops featured presentations by high-level United Nations representatives from the UN Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Task Force, United Nations Volunteers, the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Information Service, Bangkok, the Non-Governmental Liaison Service (NGLS), the NGO Section and the Financing for Development Office of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Millennium Campaign, the World Bank, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on the Millennium Development Goals.

The organizers placed special emphasis on bringing speakers who possessed first-hand knowledge of the MDG-related programmes and policies in the field. There were 31 speakers for the plenary sessions and 135 speakers for the 31 Midday NGO Interactive Workshops. For the plenary sessions, 55 per cent of the speakers were women; 40 per cent of the speakers came from developing regions.

The Midday NGO Interactive Workshops remained a popular part of the Conference in part because they offered opportunities for interventions of Conference participants. There were 140 Workshop proposals from NGOs around the world. The Midday NGO Interactive Workshop Committee gave priority to those from developing countries and those reflecting experience from the field. This year, the emphasis was placed on partnering among NGOs and limiting the number of presenters to provide more time for interaction among participants. Participants were asked to identify the dominant issue that emerged in order to prepare for presentations during the "Public Hearing" session of the Conference.

The organizers of the Conference took into account the reforms that are under way to enhance the participation of civil society partners in the work of the Organization. In keeping with the recommendations of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations, which called for more multi-stakeholder deliberations on issues of special concern such as the MDGs, the Conference held an unprecedented plenary "Public Hearing" on the final day of the meeting. Twelve NGO representatives expressed the key concerns and recommendations that had arisen from the Midday NGO Interactive Workshops, the networking sessions and preceding plenary sessions to an eminent panel consisting of Mark Malloch Brown, Administrator, UNDP; Kavita Ramdas, President, Global Fund for Women, and Jacques Attali, founding president of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

Outreach efforts

Tying the Conference more closely to the intergovernmental process, Secretary-General Kofi Annan asked for a report of the Conference proceedings. Mr. Sarbuland Khan, Director, Division for ECOSOC Support and Coordination and Ms. Hanifa Mezoui, Chief, NGO Section of DESA, offered to arrange that the findings of the Conference be presented to the High-Level Segment of the Economic and Social Council in 2005. The theme of the High Level Segment is "Achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, as well as implementing the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits: progress made, challenges and opportunities". The Conference organizers, which included a 50-member Planning Committee, made a priority of ensuring that the Conference was able to reach out to participants beyond UN Headquarters through the use of videoconferencing and, for the second year, the development of an interactive Conference web site (www.undpingoconference.org).

During the Conference, the interactive web site enabled 1,562 visits (an increase of 200 per cent from 2003) by NGO representatives and the general public to access audio and video webcasts live through the Internet on their personal computers. All seven plenary sessions were broadcast live on UNTV and webcast and archived on the Internet site.

Building on the previous year's positive experience and continuing requests from Conference participants to create more opportunities for networking and input into discussions of the Conference themes, a Networking Committee organized networking sessions each morning. The sessions were organized by facilitators (identified prior to the Conference and representative of all regions of the world) to enable personal interaction and relevant information exchange for NGO participants, as well as to identify themes and presenters for the "Public Hearing" session on the final afternoon of the Conference. The latter was a process that was coordinated with the Midday NGO Interactive Workshop Committee. The networking sessions, which involved over 200 persons, were considered to be very helpful in facilitating the one-on-one deliberations before and during the Conference. They are now an integral part of the Conference process with potential for significant follow-up activities.

The Planning Committee greatly enhanced its outreach to youth throughout the Conference process. There was unprecedented input by younger members of participating NGOs in the development of the Conference design elements, the interactive web site and its maintenance, the selection of speakers and the Conference précis. Thirteen interns from nine countries worked throughout the nine months of preparations on every aspect of the planning and servicing of the Conference itself. In addition, there were youth speakers on the plenary panels and in the Midday NGO Interactive Workshops, three of which were oriented to youth issues.

Parallel meetings and media

The UN Information Centres (UNICs) of the Department of Public Information reached out to national and local NGOs, organizing parallel meetings, seminars and conferences inspired by the DPI/NGO Conference. Such meetings took place at UNIC Tehran, UNIC Dakar, UNIC Asuncion, UNIC Moscow and at the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in Santiago. The opening session was videoconferenced to UNIC Asuncion, ECLAC in Santiago and Rutgers University, New Jersey, United States of America. The Tehran parallel Conference brought together over 80 national and local NGOs to discuss the best practices surrounding implementation of the MDGs.

The organizers focused on outreach to the media in a dual effort to ensure coverage of the Conference and to identify specific ways that the media might better support the MDGs. Both Nicholas Kristof of the *New York Times* and ZainVerjee of *CNN International* recommended ways to engage the media. Mr. Kristof argued that the MDGs as a package would not capture the attention of editors; he said that the coverage of the individual goals would be more realistic.

There was unprecedented media coverage of the Conference within the United Nations, among NGOs and in the mainstream media. Over 131 news stories were published before, during and after the Conference, representing over 170 per cent increase over 2003. Mr. Attali's keynote address appeared in full in *Le Monde* on 11 September. There was a briefing/reception hosted by the UN Correspondents Association and the NGO/DPI Executive Committee, as well as two UN press conferences during the event. In addition, there were seven radio productions by UN Radio in Chinese, English and Russian.

The Conference reception, hosted by the NGO/DPI Executive Committee, was attended by 850 persons. Over 300 participants attended the closing reception hosted by the PeaceBoat, a Japanese NGO. The event took place on board its ship docked in the New York harbour. The PeaceBoat, a peace education facility, coordinated its itinerary to attend the Conference. Similarly, the World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA) timed the release of its annual report on NGO involvement in the MDG campaigns worldwide "We the Peoples..." to coincide with the Conference. Mrs. Nane Annan hosted a luncheon at the Secretary-General's residence for the plenary speakers of the Conference. The ArtCenter of Pasadena hosted a dinner for UN system partners.